



Masculinity, Comedy, and Control: Davoud Esmaili and *The Taming of the Shrew*

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Abstract

Few dramatists have achieved the global reach and adaptability of William Shakespeare. In Iran during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979), Shakespeare’s works entered cinema in ways shaped by modernization, secularization, and Western influence, yet mediated by censorship and persistent patriarchal norms. While tragedies addressing regicide and royal authority were largely unstageable, filmmakers adapted “safe” plays like *The Taming of the Shrew* into the commercial filmfarsi genre, blending melodrama, comedy, and spectacle. Davoud Esmaili’s 1969 feature *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber*, inspired by both Shakespeare’s play and Zeffirelli’s 1967 film adaptation, exemplifies this process, presenting the comedy through exaggerated humor while normalizing masculine aggression and female subordination. Employing Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation and Laura Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze, this article examines how the film reinterprets *The Taming of the Shrew* not as critique but as reinforcement of patriarchal authority, revealing how *filmfarsi* both reflected and intensified gender hierarchies.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Adaptation; Iranian Cinema; Filmfarsi; Masculine Violence

1. Introduction

Few dramatists have achieved the cultural longevity and global presence of William Shakespeare. Over four centuries after their first performances, his plays continue to resonate with audiences and artists around the world, not only as literary texts but as flexible sources for performance, adaptation, and

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reinvention. Shakespeare's enduring relevance lies in the openness of his works: they grapple with themes of love, power, violence, identity, and desire in ways that are endlessly adaptable to new social and political contexts (Belsey, 2007, p. 3). For cinema in particular, Shakespeare has offered both narrative material and cultural prestige. From Kurosawa's reimagining of *Macbeth* in feudal Japan (*Throne of Blood*, 1957) to Baz Luhrmann's flamboyant *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), filmmakers have turned to Shakespeare as a resource through which to explore local concerns while situating their work within a transnational tradition. In this sense, Shakespeare operates as both a global icon and a malleable cultural text, able to embody the contradictions of the societies that adapt him.

Iranian cinema of during the Pahlavi era provides a striking context for Shakespeare's adaptability and universality. By the 1960s, Iranian film culture was dominated by the genre of *filmfarsi*, the popular commercial cinema characterized by melodrama, comedy, music, and recognizable stock characters – scenes of eroticism, hue and cry, and female dancer surrounded by men gazing at her (Naficy, 2011, p. 149). Although often dismissed by critics as artistically shallow, *filmfarsi* was a vital cultural form, reflecting and shaping social attitudes (p. xxiii). It was rather a cinema of contradictions. On one hand, it embraced Western cultural imports: its soundtracks often featured jazz or pop music, its mise-en-scène displayed modern fashions, and its plots sometimes depicted cosmopolitan lifestyles with alcoholic drinks and Western-style dance scenes. On the other hand, as Langford (2019) posits, *filmfarsi* reinforced conservative values, particularly around gender and family, presenting narratives in which patriarchal authority was reasserted, rebellious women were domesticated, and social order was restored at the end of the film (p. 18). These tensions, therefore, mirrored the broader contradictions of Iranian society under the Shah, caught between modernization and the preservation of traditional hierarchies.

Since Shakespeare's tragedies reflected themes such as the downfall of rulers and strained familial relationships within monarchies, they found little success on the stage during the Pahlavi era. Court censorship prevented dramatists from producing plays like *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and notably *Julius Caesar* (Milani, 2008, p. 216). In cinema, however, the situation was markedly different: filmmakers were more willing to adapt Shakespeare's works and reinterpret them within the *filmfarsi* tradition. Accordingly, Davood Esmaili's 1969 film *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber* (*Gorbeh ra Dam-e Hojleh Mikoshand*) exemplifies how Shakespeare could be appropriated within this cultural and cinematic landscape. Perhaps, under the influence of the success of Franco Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967), started Richard Burton as Petruchio and Elizabeth Taylor as Kate the

shrew, Esmaili inspired to adapt Shakespeare's comedy on the Iranian screen for domestic audience. The title itself, drawn from a Persian proverb, encapsulates the central theme: discipline and control must be asserted at the outset of marriage if the husband is to maintain control. This proverbial logic resonates closely with Shakespeare's play, which dramatizes the "taming" of a resistant, outspoken woman through humiliation, coercion, and violence to "accepting subordination" (Novy, 2017, p. 17).

Esmaili's adaptation transposes this narrative into the conventions of *filmfarsi*, producing a film that is simultaneously comic entertainment and a disturbing affirmation of patriarchal violence. On the surface, the film aligns with popular comedy, offering exaggerated characters, humorous scenarios, and familiar tropes. Beneath this veneer, however, it presents a troubling vision of masculine aggression towards women. Its central male figure, Mamali Barzakh (played by Hossein Gil), the Iranian Petruchio, is an aggressive troublemaker whose aggression, verbal abuse, and unruly behaviour are framed as both humorous and necessary strategies for taming Hengameh (played by Katayoon Amirebrahimi). His violence is normalized through comedy, transforming acts of domination into spectacles of laughter. In this way, the film embeds patriarchal aggression not as a problem but as a solution, reinforcing the idea that women must be disciplined into compliance in twentieth century Iran. The only study on the Iranian film is by Sadeghi, Hadaegh, and Ghasemi (2020), which examines the Iranian adaptation through a comparative lens alongside Zeffirelli's feature film and Shakespeare's playtext. While their work provides valuable insights and thoughtful analysis of adaptation techniques and intertextual comparisons, it remains largely expository. Crucially, the study overlooks the central themes of masculine violence and female oppression in Esmaili's film.

Therefore, this article employs Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation alongside Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze to examine this process of gendered representation and masculine violence in Esmaili's film adaptation. Hutcheon emphasizes that adaptations are not passive reproductions but active reinterpretations that generate meaning within specific cultural contexts. From this perspective, *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber* is not simply a derivative version of *The Taming of the Shrew* but a localized rewriting that reflects the ideological anxieties of Iranian society in the 1960s. Mulvey's framework, in turn, enables us to unpack how this film constructs femininity as spectacle and subordinates women to patriarchal control. Together, these methodologies reveal how Shakespeare's play is reimagined not as a site of critique or hybridity, but as a vehicle for consolidating male authority. By situating *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber* within the dual frameworks of adaptation theory

and feminist film theory, the article explores how Iranian *filmfarsi* both reflected and reinforced patriarchal anxieties during the late 1960s, presenting women as spectacles of disorder whose only function was to be disciplined into compliance. In doing so, the film reveals the power of adaptation not merely to translate texts across cultures, but to reproduce—and intensify—the structures of domination embedded within them.

2. Shakespeare in *Filmfarsi*

The reception of Shakespeare in pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema cannot be separated from the political and cultural transformations of the Pahlavi period (1925–1979). During this era, state-led modernization and secularization policies sought to align Iran with Western cultural models, and Shakespeare—long established as a symbol of literary prestige—entered translation, theatre, and eventually film (Partovi, 2023). Yet these reforms were neither comprehensive nor uncontested: patriarchal norms remained deeply embedded in society, and censorship laws, designed to regulate both political dissent and moral expression, significantly shaped how Shakespeare could be adapted for Iranian audiences (Mirsepassi, 2019, p. 100). This cultural and political context helps explain why certain Shakespearean tragedies, particularly those concerned with regicide and troubled royal families (*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, etc), were rarely staged or filmed. Their themes of rebellion, tyrannicide, and contested sovereignty were politically sensitive under the monarchy, rendering them risky choices for filmmakers. Instead, adaptations favored “safe” plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, which revolve around universal themes of love, jealousy, and domestic problems rather than challenges to the royal power of the king. These narratives were less threatening to state authorities and could be aligned naturally with the conventions of *filmfarsi*, the dominant genre of Iranian popular cinema, allowing filmmakers to explore tragedy, conflict, and gendered violence within melodramatic and socially acceptable frameworks.

The earliest cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare in Iran was *Ghroob-e Eshgh* (*Sunset of Love*), directed by Ahmad Fahmi in 1954 (1333 SH). The film was based on *Romeo and Juliet*. Although no copies survive, the film’s emphasis on tragic romance mirrored the melodramatic tendencies of 1950s Iranian cinema. Love stories—often tragic—were central to the cultural imagination, making Shakespeare’s tale of star-crossed lovers a natural fit for popular audiences. By the late 1960s, Iranian cinema was undergoing a period of transition. In 1969 (1348 SH), Dariush Mehrjui’s *The Cow* and Mas‘ud Kimiai’s *Qeysar* inaugurated a neo-realistic filmmaking in Iranian cinema, later known as New

Wave, challenging the dominance of formulaic *filmfarsi* (Demy-Geroe, 2020, p. 95). In the same year, Davoud Esma'ili directed *Gorbeh rā dam-e hejleh mikoshānd* (*The Cat is Killed at the Bridal Chamber*, also known as *The Disobedient Woman*), a comedy adapted from Shakespeare's play. Starring Hossein Gil and Katayoun Amir-Ebrahimi, the film localized Shakespeare's gender politics, staging patriarchal anxieties about marriage and female agency in a form both entertaining and accessible to popular audiences.

In 1970 (1349 SH), Azizollah Bahadori, a graduate of the Prague Film School, adapted *King Lear* into the *filmfarsi* melodrama *Dokhtar-e Zalem-e Balā* (*The Cruel and Naughty Daughter*). While the film retained surface narrative elements, it stripped away Shakespeare's explorations of power, legitimacy, and political order, subjects considered too sensitive for Pahlavi censors (Hosseini, 2022, p. 371). Instead, the adaptation emphasized melodrama and familial conflict, demonstrating how censorship shaped which Shakespearean narratives could be publicly told. Shakespeare's *Othello* was also adapted in the early 1970s. In 1973 (1352 SH), Reza Mirlouhi, a leftist director familiar with European theatrical adaptations, released *Shouresh* (*Uprising*), reframing *Othello*'s jealousy and tragic downfall through a distinctly Iranian cultural lens. In the same year, Reza Fazeli's *Maghrebi* (*The Moroccan*) offered a more conventional melodramatic treatment. Both adaptations highlight how *Othello*, with its themes of mistrust, jealousy, and domestic violence, could be integrated into Iranian cinematic traditions while remaining politically unobjectionable.

On the eve of the Revolution, Iraj Ghaderi directed *Baradarkoshi* (*Fratricide*, 1978/1357 SH), a retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*. By situating Shakespeare's tale of feuding families within the idioms of Iranian melodrama, Ghaderi demonstrated the enduring adaptability of Shakespeare's works to local cultural forms, showing how romantic tragedy could explore social and familial conflict while remaining "safe" under censorship. Taken together, these films illustrate how Shakespeare's works were selectively appropriated in Iranian cinema during the Pahlavi era. The tragedies chosen—*Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*—avoided politically sensitive themes of regicide or challenges to royal authority, while still engaging audiences with love, jealousy, and domestic conflict. Adaptations such as *The Taming of the Shrew* also demonstrate how Shakespeare could be used to address patriarchal anxieties, reflecting tensions between Western cultural influence, censorship, and deeply entrenched social norms.

It is also worthy noting that *The Taming of the Shrew* has long attracted filmmakers worldwide. From the earliest years of cinema, it inspired multiple adaptations: in 1908, D. W. Griffith directed a 17-

minute silent short in the United States, while in Italy, the Pineschi brothers produced an 8-minute silent version that same year. In 1911, F. R. Benson directed another 12-minute silent film. The first serious feature-length adaptation appeared in 1929, directed by Sam Taylor and starring Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Perhaps the most influential cinematic version came in 1967, when Franco Zeffirelli directed *The Taming of the Shrew* with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in leading roles. The play was also adapted in Soviet cinema as *Ukroshchenie Stroptivoy* (1961), directed by Sergei Kolosov. The enduring cinematic appeal of the comedy, in both world and Iranian cinema, lies in its exploration of gender, power, and domestic conflict—issues that resonate across cultures. For Iranian filmmakers, its comedic structure and focus on marriage, obedience, and rivalry offered a way to engage with societal norms around patriarchy and female agency without directly challenging political authority. Its flexibility in blending romance, conflict, and comedy made it particularly suitable for *filmfarsi*, where melodramatic conventions allowed filmmakers to explore complex social issues within a culturally familiar framework (Boose, 1994). This international and intercultural cinematic history sets the stage for examining the play's particular significance in Iran, which will be discussed in the following section.

3. Adaptation Theory

The concept of “adaptation” has long occupied a central position in debates about literature, film, and cultural production. At its most basic, adaptation refers to the process of transforming a source text into a new work, often by changing its medium, context, or form. Novels are turned into films, plays into operas, historical events into television dramas. According to Sanders (2016), despite its ubiquity, adaptation is far from a simple matter of copying or transferring material. It is instead a complex process of interpretation, negotiation, and re-creation (p. 3). To adapt is to reimagine, to translate, and to refashion cultural material for new audiences and purposes. According to Leitch (2007), traditional views of adaptation, known as fidelity criticism, often treated it as a hierarchical relationship between an “original” and a “secondary” text (p. 120). In this model, the value of an adaptation was measured by its fidelity to the source: the closer it was to the original, the more legitimate it seemed (Sanders, 2016, p. 2). This fidelity discourse, however, reduces adaptation to a question of accuracy and assumes that the source text possesses a stable authority that the adaptation can only imitate. It also disregards the fact that audiences interpret adaptations differently depending on their social, historical and cultural context, and that they often achieve significance precisely by departing from their sources. Over the last few

decades, scholars have sought to move beyond this limited framework, proposing instead that adaptation is best understood as a dynamic and creative cultural practice.

A prominent scholar of adaptation studies, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006; 2nd ed. 2013) has become one of the most influential contributions to this rethinking. For Hutcheon, adaptation is not a derivative or secondary act but a legitimate mode of storytelling in its own right (p. xx). Hutcheon defines adaptation in three overlapping ways: as a product, as a process of creation, and as a process of reception (p. 8). Each of these perspective sheds light on different aspects of how adaptations work and why they matter. First, as Hutcheon states, adaptation can be understood as a product: the tangible work that results from reinterpreting a source. A film version of a novel, for example, is an adaptation in its material form, existing alongside but distinct from its source text. Seeing adaptation as a product allows us to explore its formal strategies—its narrative choices, stylistic innovations, or changes in characterization (p. 16). This approach highlights the creative agency of the adaptor, who shapes the new text to suit different media conventions or cultural contexts. Second, adaptation is a process of creation. Here Hutcheon emphasizes the adaptive act as one of reinterpretation and re-creation. To adapt is not to copy but to reimagine. Adapters make deliberate decisions about what to keep, what to omit, and what to transform, guided by the affordances of a new medium, the expectations of a new audience, or the pressures of a new historical moment (p. 2). This process acknowledges that adaptations always involve negotiation: they must remain recognizably connected to their sources while also offering something new.

Finally, adaptation is a process of reception. For Hutcheon, adaptations gain meaning in part through the audience's awareness of their relationship to prior works. Audiences experience adaptations with a "palimpsestuous" consciousness: they watch the new work while recalling echoes of the source (p. 6). This double vision—seeing both the adaptation and the adapted—creates pleasure and meaning. Recognizing a familiar character, theme, or plot twist can produce satisfaction, while noticing a significant change can prompt reflection on why the change was made. In this sense, the act of watching or reading an adaptation is itself interpretive, shaped by cultural memory and prior knowledge. Hutcheon's model, thus, challenges fidelity criticism by showing that adaptation is not about measuring accuracy but about exploring transformation. This perspective frees adaptations from the stigma of derivativeness and allows them to be studied as works that both depend on and depart from their sources.

Adaptation, in Hutcheon's framework, is also deeply tied to issues of cultural politics. Because adaptations occur in specific historical and social contexts, they inevitably reflect the values, anxieties, and ideologies of the societies that produce them. A Shakespeare play adapted in 1960s Iranian cinema will not serve the same cultural function as one adapted in twenty-first-century Britain. Each adaptation speaks to its own moment, using the authority of a pre-existing text to address contemporary concerns. For this reason, Hutcheon emphasizes that adaptations should be studied not only in terms of their intertextual relationship to sources but also in relation to the cultural circumstances of their production and reception (p. 7). For Hutcheon, the works of adaptation are also performative acts of interpretation. They are not neutral or transparent; they always involve choices about representation, ideology, and power. By changing who speaks, who is silenced, or what is emphasized, adaptations can reinforce or challenge dominant cultural narratives. This makes them an important site for critical inquiry: they reveal how societies use stories to negotiate questions of identity, gender, nation, and authority.

In summary, Hutcheon's theory of adaptation provides a framework for understanding adaptation as a creative, dialogic, and culturally situated practice. By conceptualizing adaptation as product, process, and reception, she moves beyond fidelity criticism and highlights the richness of adaptive acts. Adaptations are not failures to replicate but opportunities to reinterpret, translating stories across media and cultures in ways that generate new meanings. For scholars of film and literature, Hutcheon's approach underscores the idea that a work of adaptation is not secondary to its sources but equally worthy of analysis in its own right, "repetition without replication" (p. 7). The subsequent section offers a close analysis of Esmaili's film version of *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to uncover and examine the ways in which the film portrays masculine violence which reinforces the exploitative structures of patriarchy in pre-revolutionary Iran.

4. *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber: Stories of Violence and Masculinity*

The first Persian translation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* appeared in 1900, produced by Hossein-Qoli Mirza Salour, better known as E'temad al-Saltaneh. The timing and context of this translation are striking. Emerging in the late the Qajar era—a period deeply marked by patriarchy and misogyny—it is possible to draw connections between the patriarchal structures embedded in Iranian society at the time and the gender politics of Shakespeare's play. As Bozorgmehr (2015) puts it, Salour's translation thus resonates not only as a literary endeavor but also as a cultural act entangled with the

socio-political fabric of Qajar Iran. Following this initial effort, the play did not receive another Persian translation for nearly a century. Farīdeh Mahdavi-Damghani's version appeared in 1997, followed by those of Kurosh Asadollahi in 2012 and Mohsen Ghasemi in 2017. The ninety-seven-year gap between Salour's translation and Mahdavi-Damghani's return to the text underscores both the challenges and sensitivities of reintroducing Shakespeare's notoriously gendered comedy into an Iranian context. Iran has long been a society structured by patriarchal values, and in such a context the translation, adaptation, and staging of *The Taming of the Shrew* carry a particular resonance. Each new rendering of the play not only mediates Shakespeare's text for Persian readers but also reflects—and to some extent negotiates—the enduring tensions around gender, authority, and power in Iranian cultural life.

What is particularly revealing about Esmaili's film is the way it stages the contradictions of Iranian society. Some sequences showcase Western music and dance, portraying an Iran that aspires to modern cosmopolitan lifestyles. This reflects the contradictory policy of the Pahlavi era, when Iranians witnessed both secularised modernity and the persistence of traditional values, resulted in the creation of a polarized nation filled with “contradictory statements” around sociocultural topics and issues (Mirsepassi, 2021, p. 89). At the same time, the film presents cabaret scenes: noisy, male-dominated spaces where half-naked women dance under the gaze of men. These sequences simultaneously critique and perpetuate a period of decadence. On the one hand, the cabaret functions as a symbol of moral decline, a sign of social corruption that the narrative appears to condemn. On the other hand, the film's very representation of women as erotic spectacle enacts what Laura Mulvey (2019) terms the “male gaze” (p. 18): the camera fragments and fetishises the female body, aligning the audience with a masculine perspective that turns women into objects of visual pleasure. In this way, the cabaret dancers and female characters more broadly appear as stock figures—dancers, wives, shrews—whose identities are constructed entirely in relation to men. The film thus embodies an anti-feminine impulse: it uses women as symbols of disorder while denying them subjectivity, ensuring their only function is to be controlled, tamed, or consumed. What sets this particular film apart from the bulk of *filmfarsi* output is that it reworks Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, a Renaissance comedy already fraught with questions of female resistance, patriarchal control, and the politics of marriage. By adapting Shakespeare into the idiom of 1960s Iranian cinema, Esmaili creates a text that simultaneously reflects the conventions of *filmfarsi* and reshapes Shakespeare's drama for a modernizing Iranian society.

The film begins with an animated sequence in which a rebellious white cat clashes with a black cat until they merge into a black heart outlined in white. This animation functions as a cinematic prologue, analogous to Shakespeare's Christopher Sly induction scene in the original text, in which a play about wife-taming is presented. On the surface, this appears playful, even whimsical. Yet allegorically it signals the story's ideological trajectory: female resistance will be confronted, fought, and ultimately absorbed into a heterosexual union that erases difference. The cat allegory condenses Shakespeare's entire taming narrative into a visual metaphor of subsumption, where the unruly woman, like the white cat, must be domesticated. As Hutcheon (2013) observes, adaptations are never simple reproductions; they often rely on condensation and metaphor to translate complex intertextual relationships into signs that are legible and compelling for new audiences (p. 142). Beyond this, adaptations also function as forms of commentary: by choosing to present rebellion through anthropomorphized cats, Esmaili interprets Shakespeare's narrative through the ideological lens of 1960s Iran, foregrounding patriarchal control while removing ambiguity. Crucially, the image anticipates not an equal romance but an asymmetrical union in which one force dominates the other, offering a visual blueprint for the patriarchal closure to come—a reinterpretation that both condenses and ideologically reshapes the source material in line with Hutcheon's theory.

The live-action film opens in a nightclub, where Western music plays and the camera lingers not on faces or personalities but on the bare legs of dancing women. Men in suits drink and watch. The *mise-en-scène* is urban, cosmopolitan, and saturated with symbols of modernity, yet its gender politics remain starkly traditional. Mulvey's male gaze is enacted immediately as the female body is fragmented, fetishized, and displayed for visual pleasure: "The actual female body is exchanged into money and materializes in the virtual image on the screen or in the circus ring" (2019, p. 35). By denying the women subjectivity—showing only their legs, the stylized movements of their hips—the camera aligns the audience with a masculine perspective. Within Hutcheon's terms, this is not simply Shakespeare transposed but Shakespeare filtered through the conventions of *filmfarsi*, where cabaret numbers and erotic spectacle were obligatory components. The nightclub scenes thus perform a double adaptation: they translate Shakespeare into Iranian cinematic codes while also embedding his narrative into a globalized visual economy of female objectification.

As the plot unfolds, we meet the family whose daughters recall Shakespeare's Bianca and Katherine. Fereshteh, like Bianca, is positioned as the desirable younger sister, and from the outset she

is paired romantically with Behrouz, the Lucentio figure. But the narrative obstacle remains the elder sister, here named Hengameh, whose unruliness prevents Fereshteh's marriage. The father, played by Foroughi, acknowledges Hengameh's power openly, even admitting his fear of her. In Shakespeare, Baptista is stern and pragmatic, his authority unquestioned; in Esmaili's film, paternal authority is weakened, and the father's fear of his daughter is made explicit. This alteration is not trivial: it dramatizes female disobedience as a threat so profound that even patriarchs cower before it. Hutcheon's point that works of adaptation reveal as much about their cultural context as about their source is helpful here (2013, p. 34); Esmaili's emphasis on paternal fear reflects anxieties about female autonomy in 1960s Iran, where modernization created new possibilities for women's education and visibility but also provoked patriarchal backlash.

Hengameh's characterization departs from Shakespeare's Katherine in another key way. As Preeshl (2022, p. 7) observes, Katherine in the original play is primarily defined by her verbal wit, her sharp tongue, her verbal resistance to the scripts of marriage, though commodified in the end. In contrast, Hengameh is defined by physical aggression. Her presence is signaled by sounds of smashing objects, by the fearful retreat of servants, by the comic image of men fleeing her violence. When suitors attempt to approach her, she responds not with words but with blows. This translation of verbal rebellion into physical force is partly a function of medium—cinema demands visible spectacle rather than linguistic wit—but it is also ideological. By making the woman's resistance bodily, the film frames it as irrational, excessive, and destructive, thus preparing the audience to accept its violent disciplining. In Hutcheon's terms, adaptation involves not only transposition but also reinterpretation: Esmaili reinterprets Shakespeare's shrew as a figure whose defiance is physical and hysterical, thereby justifying an even more brutal process of taming in patriarchal structures of Iran.

The suitor who emerges as her tamer is Mamali Barzakh, a figure both feared and respected in the diegesis. His introduction occurs in a cabaret, where he sits as a feared patron, served lavishly by waiters who cower before him. His masculinity is constructed not through wit, as Petruchio's is in Shakespeare, but through sheer intimidation. He is coded as a thug, a man of the underworld, but also as someone whose violence grants him power. In this way, the portrayal of Barzakh successfully relocates Shakespeare's Petruchio to modern Iran. To cite *Mulvey* (2019, p. 43) again, the cabaret setting reinforces the male gaze and erotic view of women like a circus: while women dance as objects of spectacle, men negotiate power, make deals, and plot marriages. It is in this male homosocial space that Behrouz and

Mansour recruit Barzakh to marry Hengameh, luring him with promises of wealth. The film thus makes explicit what in Shakespeare is implicit: that marriage is a transaction among men, with women exchanged as property. By cutting the subplot of dowries, the film aligns itself with Pahlavi modernization by erasing rural customs like bride-price, yet this erasure does not liberate women; rather, it consolidates their status as pawns in a male economy of money and violence.

The first encounter between Hengameh and Barzakh crystallizes the film's ideological message that men should control women's body and fate. Hengameh strikes him, resists him physically, but Barzakh remains unaffected, finally pinning her to the bed, twisting her arm, and threatening to break it if she does not obey. The imagery is stark: the male body literally controls the female body, transforming resistance into submission through force. Shakespeare's verbal sparring, often read as playful or ironic, is here replaced with physical assault. To paraphrase Churchill (2018, p. 21), such depiction of scenes of violence and coercion in the *filmfarsi* is in a way suggestive of the violent nature of Iranian society as a whole in the 1960s. The adaptation thus removes ambiguity: where Shakespeare leaves open the possibility of irony in Katherine's final speech, Esmaili's film insists on the reality of submission, showing the process as one of coercion. This is not just a difference of medium but a difference of ideology. The Iranian Katherine must be broken physically, not persuaded through language, a reflection of patriarchal anxieties about women's potential autonomy in a society negotiating modern gender roles.

Throughout the film, women's bodies are simultaneously sources of pleasure and objects of discipline. The servants in the household are all attractive young women in short skirts, positioned as visual decoration. Cabaret dancers fill the frame in sequences that suspend the narrative, catering to *filmfarsi*'s formula of song-and-dance numbers. In each case, the female body is staged for the male gaze, confirming Mulvey's claim that mainstream cinema structures its images for male visual pleasure: "It activates the fetishistic aspects of voyeuristic pleasure, in which the female form has the allure" (1989, p. xii). But alongside spectacle is punishment: Hengameh is beaten into submission, her unruliness disciplined until she becomes the docile wife. This is indicative of Michel Foucault's assertion of mechanism of power as to control the body and make "docile" subjects (1977, p.). The dual logic of spectacle and submission encapsulates the patriarchal ideology of both Shakespeare's play and its Iranian adaptation, intensified through cinematic means.

The transformation of Hengameh after marriage is central. Once defiant and feared, she becomes meek, fearful, and dependent. Her gestures soften, her voice diminishes, and in a telling scene she moves

from sleeping in a separate room to seeking refuge in her husband's bed, not from love but from fear. This shift dramatizes what early modern ideologies saw as the effect of marriage on women: sex and patriarchal control would be taming forces for the unruly female body as adopting a "sexual approach" is promising and productive in subordinating a shrew (Kusunoki, 2015, p. 12). By visualizing this transformation as an immediate and total change, Esmaili eliminates any ambiguity about whether Hengameh's submission is sincere. She is no longer the violent rebel but the obedient wife, her independence erased. Hutcheon (2013, p. 145) would describe this process as adaptation's ideological function: by altering emphasis, tone, and representation, the film reinterprets the original story to align with contemporary patriarchal norms. The film's conclusion reinforces this closure. In the final scene, Barzakh wagers on which wife will come when called, and Hengameh complies immediately, delivering a speech that mirrors Katherine's in Shakespeare but without irony. She chastises other women, praises men for their labor and sacrifice, and insists on female obedience as a natural duty. Whereas Shakespeare's ending has been endlessly debated—some critics seeing Katherine's speech as sincere, others as ironic, still others as performative—Esmaili's version forecloses debate. The speech is earnest, affirming male authority without hesitation. In adaptation terms, the ambiguity of Shakespeare is domesticated for an Iranian audience: the woman must submit, the man must rule, and the story ends in harmony. In Hutcheon's view, adaptation is always a form of commentary, "a transaction between texts and between languages," and here the commentary is unambiguous (p. 16): whatever Renaissance playfulness Shakespeare might have entertained, Esmaili's film insists on patriarchal closure. The final moments, with group dancing and laughter, frame this submission as joyous resolution. The woman's voice, which once shouted in anger and broke objects in rebellion, is now given to song in celebration of her domestication. The male gaze is satisfied not only by spectacle but by narrative closure: the unruly woman has been transformed, and patriarchal order is restored.

5. Conclusion

In Davoud Esmaili's *filmfarsi* adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* masculine violence and the control of women's bodies are central to both narrative and ideological structure. Esmaili transforms Shakespeare's verbal sparring into physical conflict, presenting Hengameh's resistance as chaotic, violent, and destabilizing, and therefore in need of suppression. This shift from verbal wit to bodily aggression reflects the demands of cinema, which privileges visible action, but it also conveys a broader

ideological message: female rebellion is dangerous and must be neutralized. Through Hutcheon's lens of adaptation, the film operates as both transposition and commentary: it translates Shakespeare's narrative into the cinematic codes of *filmfarsi*—including cabaret sequences, musical interludes, and urban spectacle—while interpreting the play through the socio-cultural lens of 1960s Iran, a society negotiating modernization and patriarchal anxiety. Mulvey's concept of the male gaze further illuminates the film's visual politics. Women are consistently fragmented and fetishized, their bodies presented for the visual pleasure of both diegetic men and the audience, whether in cabaret numbers or domestic spaces. Men, in contrast, exercise power through negotiation, coercion, and physical dominance, establishing a clear gender hierarchy in which the female body is both object and site of control. The narrative closure—Hengameh's total submission and public affirmation of male authority—confirms the ideological imperative of the adaptation: rebellion must be contained, female autonomy erased, and patriarchal order restored.

Esmacili's *The Cat Is Killed at the Bridal Chamber* exemplifies how Shakespeare's comedy can be mobilized to normalize patriarchal authority, celebrate masculine violence, and enforce female subjugation through cinematic spectacle. The film illustrates how adaptation is never a neutral act of repetition; it is interpretive, cultural, and ideological, revealing as much about the society that produces it as about the source material. In this context, the film functions as both entertainment and moral commentary, merging the conventions of *filmfarsi* with Shakespeare's narrative to produce a vision of gendered control that is immediate, total, and visually unambiguous. Future research might examine how similar mechanisms of masculine dominance and visual spectacle operate in other non-Western adaptations of early modern texts, particularly in societies grappling with modernization, shifting gender norms, and the persistent tension between traditional values and global cultural influences.

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